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JESUS OF NAZARETH

HOW HE THOUGHT, LIVED, WORKED, AND ACHIEVED

By ERNEST D. BURTON

19. BEGINNINGS OF A JOURNEY THROUGH PEREA LUKE 9:51—10:24

Mark's story of Jesus' work in Galilee ends with his ninth chapter. At this point Luke gives us nearly nine chapters of valuable information before he, with Mark, records the return of Jesus to Jerusalem. These chapters, with the possible addition of Luke 19:1-28, probably formed a gospel of themselves, one of the "many" spoken of in Luke's preface. We have reason to be very grateful that Luke incorporated it in his book. The plan of this "gospel" is rather obscure, but the contents are very valuable. Occasionally it duplicates Mark, but most of it is quite distinct from Mark. Some portions of this interesting book we shall now study, generally omitting the parts resembling Mark.

Read Luke 9:51-56. What is the fundamental difference between the spirit of James and John as seen in their proposal and that of Jesus as you have observed in our study of him thus far?

Read Luke 9:57-62. In the case of each of these three men there was evidently an attitude which Jesus saw or suspected would prevent his being a real disciple. What was it in each case, and why did it interfere with discipleship? Read again Mark 8:34. Was Jesus' demand an arrogant or unreasonable one? If not, why not?

Read Luke 10:1-16. Recall that on a previous occasion Jesus is said to have sent out the Twelve (Mark 6:7-12) with instructions quite similar to those which he now gives to the Seventy. What was the purpose of these evangelistic missions? What does the fact that Jesus sent out this large company indicate as to his desire to bring his message to the people?

Read Luke 10:13-16. In these verses Jesus implies that the greater light one has the greater the condemnation for rejecting it. Is this a principle of universal application? Does it apply to individuals only or to cities and to nations? Can you think of any illustrations in history of a nation suffering for its wrong attitude toward truth? Verse 16 states a very important principle. Is it that he who rejects a messenger who brings proper credentials rejects the sender, or that he who rejects a true message rejects the God of truth? If the former, what did Jesus regard as the credentials by which they should have recognized him as a messenger of God?

Read Luke 10:17-24. Are verses 18, 19 to be taken literally or figuratively? Two thoughts stand out clearly and strongly in verses 21-24: (1) humility and teachableness rather than learning, the condition of receiving truth (vs. 21); (2) the unique value of the revelation of God that comes through the Son (vss. 22-24). Do you think that Jesus was including himself under the term "babes" in verse 21 as one who without the learning of the schools of the scribes had come

to see and know the truth, or was he thinking only of other people? How did Jesus gain knowledge of the truth? See Matt. 10:29. What was the greatest obstacle to acceptance of himself and his message that Jesus encountered?

Suggestions for further study: 1. Where was Samaria? Who were the Samaritans (Luke 9:52) and what was their relation to the Jews? 2. Where were the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in which Jesus is said to have done mighty works, and in which of them do the Gospels contain a record of Jesus having worked? 3. How does the principle of Luke 10:16 apply in modern times?

20. TEACHINGS ABOUT THE SUPREME GOOD. LUKE 10:25—11:13

It is not always possible in this part of Luke's Gospel to discover the principle of arrangement, but these verses seem to gather around the thought of what is most important in life.

Read Luke 10:25-37, commonly called the parable of the Good Samaritan. Of the two great commandments which the scribe quotes, which does the story of the Good Samaritan explain? What is the significance of the fact that Jesus, in effect asked to explain what is most fundamental in religion, first approves the answer of the scribe which reduces this to love to God and man, and then, when asked for an explanation of the latter of these, puts the emphasis on kindness to a fellow human being in distress? Why does he choose a priest and a Levite to illustrate the neglect of the unfortunate traveler, and a Samaritan as the person who helped him? In whom or in what does Jesus find the real values of the world? Who would Jesus say keeps law most truly, a minister of religion who does all his religious duties perfectly, but who is indifferent to the suffering of his fellow-men, or a heretic, or a heathen who loves his fellow-men?

Read Luke 10:38-42. Does the teaching of this story seem to be the opposite of that of verses 25-37? Does this story mean that the physical needs of life are not real ones, that right ideas are all that is necessary, or is it rather a gentle rebuke of one who was inclined to overemphasize the importance of physical comforts?

Read Luke 11:1-13. One's prayers, not formal, but real, are an index of one's estimate of values. Notice then the emphasis of the prayer of Jesus. What object of desire is put into the foreground (vs. 2)? Whom and how many would the granting of this petition affect? How would it affect them? Whose need and what kind does verse 3 recognize? For what kind of good does verse 4 ask, and for whom? Is the prayer one-sided or many-sided? In the light of it, what do you judge Jesus regarded as really important? One's prayers will be determined by what kind of God we think that we are praying to. Read verses 5-13 again and consider what kind of a being Jesus believed God to be.

Suggestions for further study: 1. Tell the story of Jesus' conversation with the lawyer, and the parable of the Good Samaritan in modern terms, drawing the illustrations from present-day conditions. 2. Re-read Matt. 5:5-15 and Luke 11:1-13 and state what Jesus believed about prayer. In view of Jesus' idea of God what would he say God would do if his children asked for things not best for them, like a child asking his father for a scorpion or poison?

21. JESUS' CRITICISM OF THE PHARISEES. LUKE 11:37-54

We pass over Luke 11:14-36 because we have already studied similar passages in Mark. Read Luke 11:37-44 and notice that Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees

is not for having done things that were wrong, but for a false estimate of relative values, for counting small things great, and great things small. Notice also what kind of things they were that Jesus counted great and what he counted small.

Read Luke 11:45-54, and notice of just what Jesus accuses the scribes in verses 46 and 52. Could the scribes have said these things of Jesus? Why not? Verses 47 and 48 are obscure. They seem to mean that in the very act of honoring the prophets whom their fathers rejected they both condemn the act of their fathers and confess their relationship to them; they ought therefore to be on their guard against repeating the fault of their fathers, yet were not so. Does the principle of verses 50 and 51 seem to be unjust? Yet is not this the way that things actually happen in national history? Is not the effect of an evil course of action cumulative, until there comes a time when disastrous consequences of wrongdoing of many generations fall upon the last of them? Does recent history illustrate this?

22. TEACHING ABOUT FEARING AND TRUSTING GOD. LUKE 12:1-34

This is one of the great passages of the Gospels. It deserves very thoughtful reading. Its central thought is the safety of trust in God, but with this is associated in verses 1-3 the thought that one cannot have two faiths, one that he actually holds, and the other that he professes. In verses 4-12 the two ideas of fear and trust are alternatively emphasized, combining in the thought that if we trust in God we have no one to fear. Verses 13-21 set forth the folly of the man who counts material things as the highest good and trusts in them. Verses 22-34 find in God's care of the flowers and the birds a great lesson of faith in God for men, and illustrate how Jesus reached his own religious convictions from a study of the world. Read each of these passages just named and state for yourself the teaching; and think of the kind of life Jesus was seeking by these words to persuade people to live. Mark the passage, especially verses 6, 7, 22-34, to read again and again.

Suggestions for further study: Recall what we have been studying, both lately and earlier, and try to decide which of these three theories of life Jesus would have approved: (1) The supreme good of life is to be well fed and comfortable; ideas and ideals are of no consequence. Live while you live. (2) Physical things are of no consequence; the important thing is to hold right opinions and to attend to one's religious duties. Do not bother about physical needs, your own or others'. (3) Physical needs are real. "Your father knoweth that ye have need of these things." But the physical needs are not supreme. Man is more than his body, more than an individual. He alone lives rightly who, taking account of all his needs and of his neighbors', lives for the common welfare.

23. CONCERNING WATCHFULNESS AND FAITHFULNESS. LUKE 12:35-53

To the teachings about trust in verses 22-34 Luke adds three passages that have an element of warning in them. Read Luke 12:35-40 and notice that trust in God does not exclude the necessity of being prepared for what may happen. Verse 40 applies this general teaching to readiness for the coming of the Son of Man in judgment. Read verses 41-48 and notice that the kind of watchfulness that Jesus enjoins is not idle sitting at the window, but faithful attention to one's tasks.

Read Luke 12:49-53, noticing that here Jesus warns his disciples against expecting that the path of duty will be always smooth and peaceful. He knew that he who would be faithful would often have to stand alone.

24. THE DUTY OF INTERPRETING THE TIMES. LUKE 12:54-13:9

This is one of the few passages in which Jesus touches on political conditions and is of peculiar interest to us today when so many of our most difficult moral problems have a national or political aspect. Read Luke 12:54-56 and notice that Jesus distinctly teaches the duty of understanding the meaning of what is going on about us.

Read verses 57-59 and notice that, taken in their connection, the passage, though expressed in the language of a village or city court, evidently refers to the dangers which threatened the nation and warns the hearers of Jesus that if they did not set matters right they would have an account to settle. Recall Luke 11:49-51.

Read Luke 13:1-5, noticing that Pilate was the Roman governor, not of Galilee, but of Judea, and that the Galileans whom he put to death had been visitors in Jerusalem, who were making trouble there, probably Zealots who were stirring up sedition against the Roman government. Jesus points out that there are evils in the life of the nation which if not corrected will bring them all to destruction.

Read Luke 13:6-9 and notice that again Jesus points out that the only escape from destruction is in repentance, a change of moral attitude.

Suggestions for further study: 1. Is there a life of a nation which is something additional to the life of any member of it, yet comparable to the life of an individual? Do nations come into being, grow, feel dangers, avoid them or succumb to them, and sometimes die? 2. What were the evils that threatened the life of the Jewish nation in Jesus' day? Did the nation avoid them or go down under them? 3. What are some of the greatest dangers that threaten the life of our nation today? 4. How can we avoid them? Whose business is it?

25. VARIOUS TEACHINGS ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM. LUKE 13:10-14:35

Luke, chapters 13 and 14, presents various subjects which we can best study by regrouping. Read Luke 13:10-17 and 14:1-6, and recall our previous study of Jesus' teaching about the Sabbath in Mark 2:24-28 and 3:1-17. The argument of Jesus, several times repeated in the Gospels, that man ought to be at least as merciful to men in distress on the Sabbath day as they were to their domestic beasts, evidently made a great impression on the Gospel writers.

Read Luke 13:18-21 and notice that both these parables emphasize the growth of the Kingdom from small beginnings to great results, while the second also implies that the process will be one of gradual permeation. Then read Luke 13:22-30 and observe that a different aspect of the Kingdom is emphasized, namely the fact that while it is open to all to share in the Kingdom, one may too long refuse to enter and find it impossible to do so. Read also 13:31-35, and notice a similar thought in respect to the nation, or the leaders of it, whose rejection of him Jesus by this time clearly foresaw. Read also 14:15-24, observing that here also the Kingdom of God is the subject of discourse, and Jesus indicates that many of those who had the first opportunity to enter the Kingdom would refuse, and then many others would have the opportunity.

If by the Kingdom of God Jesus meant that type of human society which was in accordance with God's will, men working together to accomplish that will, do these passages show that he looked for the complete triumph of the Kingdom? Did he at the same time perceive that it would not come about easily or without hindrance, and that many who might be expected to welcome it would reject it? How did he arrive at these convictions?

There remain now in chapter 14 three short passages which seem to have no obvious relation to the idea of the Kingdom. Read 14:7-11, the teaching of which is clearly summed up in verse 11.

Read verses 12-14 and consider whether in this rule of hospitality there is involved a broad general principle respecting men's treatment of their fellow-men. If so, what is it?

Read verses 25-33, which discuss what it costs to be a disciple of Jesus, and the wisdom of counting the cost at the outset. Is verse 26 to be taken literally, or as a forcible statement of the necessity of making discipleship to Jesus the supreme thing in life? What does the word "disciple" mean? What is it to be a disciple of Jesus? Can he be called such who serves humanity in the spirit of Jesus?

Suggestions for further study: 1. Just what was Jesus' thought about the Kingdom of God—what it was, how it was to come, suddenly or gradually; whether it would encounter obstacles; the certainty of its coming? 2. Jesus' ideal of human society; what would be the effect of applying to all human relations the principle that is implied in Luke 14:7-14?

26. JESUS' TEACHING CONCERNING THE RESCUE OF THE LOST AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINNERS LUKE, CHAPTER 15; 18:9-14; 19:1-10

Perhaps no single passage that has come down to us is familiar to more people or more esteemed than the three parables of chapter 15, especially the last one commonly called the Prodigal Son. These parables, like other notable sayings of Jesus, were spoken in explanation of his conduct and in answer to criticism. Conduct came first, explanation afterward.

Read Luke 15:1-7 and notice that the lost sheep undoubtedly represents any human being who has gone astray, lost his way in life. The purpose of the parable, as shown most clearly in verse 7, is to show how strongly God desires that the wanderer shall return, the sinner repent. Was this the way the religious teachers of Jesus' day thought of God? See verses 1 and 2.

Read Luke 15:8-10, which emphasizes by repetition and the use of a different illustration the same idea that is expressed in the previous one.

Read Luke 15:11-24, bearing in mind that the central purpose is to express Jesus' idea of God's attitude toward men who have gone wrong, but who see their wrong and wish to come back. What does the parable show to have been Jesus' idea of repentance? Is it grief that leaves a man where he was, or a change of mind that sends a man back to God? What does the degradation to which the Son had sunk before he returned suggest as to whether Jesus thought that any man could sin so deeply that God would not receive him if he wished to return? Is God's forgiveness as here represented by Jesus a mere remission of penalty, or a restoration to the loving favor of God?

Read Luke 15:25-32. In view of verses 1 and 2, which indicate that the occasion of this parable was the Pharisee's criticism of Jesus for receiving sinners and eating with them, whom does the elder brother probably represent? What is wrong about the attitude of the elder brother? How does the answer of Jesus emphasize Jesus' idea of God's attitude toward repentant sinners?

Turn forward and read Luke 18:9-14 on the prayer of the Pharisee and the publican. Here too we have Jesus' thought of how God looks at men. With whom is God most pleased, the man who is scrupulously correct in all outward matters and proud of it, or the man who knows that he is wrong and admits it? Read also Luke 19:1-10. Is verse 8, like the Pharisee's prayer, a boast of what he has done or a statement of the practice he has recently adopted or proposes to follow in the future? Jesus' answer will suggest which it was. On what is Jesus' judgment of Zaccheus based, past deeds or present character? Does Zaccheus recognize that a new purpose involves correcting past wrongs?

Suggestions for further study: 1. The passages we have been studying imply that Jesus believed that God is more concerned with a man's present attitude than with his past record, though present attitude may involve correcting past wrongs. Does it not further imply that God's attitude toward him is determined by his present condition of mind? Is this a higher or lower conception of God than that which makes him a judge who pronounces sentence on the basis of past deeds only? Which expresses a higher regard for righteousness, strict judgment on the basis of past record or the welcoming of the repentant sinner? Which shows a deeper concern for men? 2. Does human experience justify Jesus' thought on this matter? Can a man who has gone far wrong really repent and thereafter live an upright life, and does such a man gain the consciousness of God's approval?

27. THE GOSPEL OF MERCY. LUKE 16:19-17:4

Passing over the obscure parable of the Unjust Steward, Luke 16:1-13, and the collection of short sayings in 16:14-18, read Luke 16:19-31. Judging from the character of Jesus' parables in general, do you think that the meaning of this one is to be found by pressing each detail, or in the broad impression of the parable as a whole? Does it teach that the poor in this world lie in Abraham's bosom in the next, or that God utterly condemns the man who, living himself in comfort or luxury, is indifferent to the suffering of his fellow-men? Consider again, as has been repeatedly suggested, what idea of God is implied, and what conception of the real values of the world, as lying in men or in things, is suggested.

Read 17:1-4, a brief but significant passage. Could this teaching have come from one who regarded institutions or laws as more important than people, or judgment of them properly based on their past record rather than their present attitudes?

28. THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE SON OF MAN. LUKE 17:20-37

In this passage the writer seems to have gathered together various sayings about the coming of the Kingdom and of the Son of Man. Read 17:20, 21 and notice the remarkable saying "The Kingdom of God is within you," or "among you," recalling also the parable of the Leaven, with its suggestion of a force working silently and gradually. Then read verses 22-24 that these are a warning against the idea that the Son of Man will come obscurely, where only a few will

know of it. Then read verses 26-37, which speak of the coming of the Son of Man as sudden and unexpected. It is difficult to determine from the Gospels just what Jesus predicted about the future. But while these three sayings were very likely not originally spoken together, it is quite possible to find in each a thought that may well be from Jesus. The first one emphasized the presence in the world, and the pervasive working, of the force that is to transform the world. The second affirms the openness, and the third the suddenness of the judgments of God on evil; for with the coming of the Son of Man Jesus seems always to associate the idea of judgment. We have but to recall the history of Israel, or of the church, or of recent events to see the truth of all these statements. The history of the world is neither wholly one of gradual transformation nor wholly one of sudden and startling catastrophes, but partly of one and partly of the other.

Luke 18:1-8 is associated with the previous passage by the question of verse 8. To the thought that the coming of the Son of Man will be sudden and unexpected it adds the exhortation to those who are afflicted and commit their case to God in prayer and wait in faith.

Suggestions for further study: Like the Gospel of Luke and that of Matthew, the little Gospel that Luke is using here has much to say about the Kingdom of God. Recall the passages studied under section 25, and in their light and that of those just considered express Jesus' thought on these questions: What did he mean by the Kingdom of God? Did he think that it was already in existence, or still to be set up? Did he believe that it had reached its perfection or was still in process? Did he believe that it would come without hindrance or that it would eventually triumph over obstacles?

29. MARK'S ACCOUNT OF JESUS' LAST JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM MARK, CHAP. 10

Having now reached the point in Luke's narrative where he resumes that of Mark, we turn back to Mark and study his tenth chapter, in which he records Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem. There is no special unity of thought, each incident having a subject of its own.

Read Mark 10:1-12. The question which the Pharisees asked was one of those in which the scribes themselves were divided, some holding that a man might divorce his wife for any cause, others that he ought not to divorce her unless she had committed adultery. Notice that Jesus does not accept the law of Moses as final authority on the matter, but finds in the very fact that God made man of two sexes with all that this fact involved a reason why every marriage should be permanent. Is it characteristic of Jesus thus to base his judgment on ultimate facts? How is it with his saying about fasting and unclean food?

Read Mark 10:13-16. There are five things that in general characterize little children: their innocence, their unformed characters, their open-mindedness, their dependence, and the fact that in them lie the possibilities of the future. Which of these characteristics led Jesus to say that to such "belongeth the Kingdom of God"? Which had he in mind in saying, "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom as a child, he shall in no wise enter therein"?

Read Mark 10:17-22. This young man wanted to talk about saving himself in the world to come. Does Jesus say that he can be saved by keeping the commandments that he quotes, or does he imply the contrary? Is verse 22 a statement of the price at which eternal life can be bought or an endeavor to force the young man out of his attitude of concern for himself into thought for others? Does Jesus believe that man's supreme concern should be to procure future salvation for himself, or that he is saved in self-forgetful service of others? Was Jesus an otherworldly man in the sense that he thought that this world was of no consequence, or that he belittled its importance?

Read Mark 10:23-31 and consider: (1) What it is to enter the Kingdom of God. Is it to attain individual blessedness or to have part in that order of things in which men live according to God's will? If the latter, what is the governing principle of such an order of things? (2) Why riches are an obstacle to participation in such an order of things. Do they tend to make men contented with things as they are? Compare verse 15, Jesus' demand of the rich young man, verse 21, and Matt. 5:3. (3) In what sense one must leave all if he is to share fully in the Kingdom, as verses 28-30 suggest (compare Luke 14:25-27). Does this imply that one is to become indifferent to one's family or detach one's self from human affairs, or that one must merge all lesser interests in the interest of the Kingdom, the welfare of all?

Read Mark 10:32-34 and notice that as in Mark 8:31-37 Jesus associates with the prediction of his death the idea that his disciples must live on the same principles, so here he follows a statement of the all-inclusive demand of discipleship by a fresh announcement of his death.

Read Mark 10:35-40. Notice how the disciples clung to the idea that greatness consists in ruling and that Jesus was going to establish a régime in which they might have places of power and glory, while Jesus saw clearly that he was to achieve his ambition through suffering and that the disciples must share that suffering with him. Read Mark 10:41-44 and observe carefully what, in Jesus' thought, was the basis of true greatness. Finally read the great saying of verse 45 and notice that what Jesus here says of himself he gives as a reason for the kind of life that he asks his disciples to live, implying that as he lived they ought to live.

Suggestions for further study: 1. Does Jesus teach principles or promulgate rules? 2. In his teaching about marriage and divorce did he mean to lay down a rule to be enforced, by a court, or to state a fundamental principle? Would this principle permit marriage to be entered into with the thought that if it did not work it could be dissolved? 3. Would it demand that a wife should remain with a husband under all possible circumstances? What was Jesus' ultimate test of right conduct, its conformity to some rule or its conduciveness to human welfare? 4. Does Jesus set one standard of life for himself and another for his disciples or does he ask them to live on the same principle that he lived? Is this what discipleship means? 5. Is Jesus' way of living practicable for men in general or is it possible for a few only? 6. If men generally lived on the principles stated by Jesus in Mark 10:45 what would be the effect on human society? In that case would men actually have to die as he did? Why did adherence to this principle in his case bring him to his death?

THE WEEK OF TRIUMPH AND OF SUFFERING

30. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS ASSERTED AND DENIED IN
JERUSALEM. MARK 11:1-33

Read Mark 11:1-11, and picture the scene to yourself. The Mount of Olives is east of Jerusalem and separated from it by a deep valley. Bethany was a village on the eastern slope of the mountain, and Bethphage was doubtless near it. The road which was followed was probably not over the top of the hill, but the one that bends to the south around the hill and from which the city comes in sight about halfway from Bethany to the eastern gate of the city.

Notice that Jesus planned this entrance into the city sending, probably to people whom he knew, to borrow the colt for the purpose. If he did not tell the people what to shout, or perhaps expect them to shout anything, the record at least says nothing of any effort on his part to silence or check them. Why did he pursue so different a course on this occasion from that which he had followed previously (Mark 8:30; 9:9)?

It is clear on the one hand that Jesus did not believe himself to be the Messiah in the sense in which many of the people were looking for the Messiah, and that, perhaps for this reason, he for a long time forbade his disciples to announce him as the Messiah. Now, however, he permits himself without protest to be addressed in language that suggests that he is the Messiah. Is it possible that facing the probability of his early death (see Mark 10:32-34) he felt that despite the risk of being misunderstood he must let it be known that he claimed to be the Messiah?

[Luke 19:37-44 contains some interesting additions to Mark's story, suggesting that besides Mark he had another account of the event.]

Read Mark 11:12-14. This story has troubled many readers of the Gospels, especially because it seems to represent Jesus as destroying by his word an inanimate object of value because it had no fruit out of season. Read as a parable referring to the Jewish nation, however, it is full of significance. Because on the fig tree the fruit usually comes before the leaves, a tree having leaves but no fruit symbolizes a nation loud in professions but lacking in corresponding deeds. This is just what Jesus said was true of the Jewish nation quoting the words of Isaiah: "This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mark 7:6). On such a nation the curse of those that say but do not is sure to fall. Compare Matt. 7:26, 27. In the Gospel of Luke (13:6-9) there is a parable of An Unfruitful Fig Tree, evidently taken from that Gospel which Mark did not have. Is it on the whole more likely that the story in Mark was originally such a parable, turned into an incident, than that Jesus actually blighted a fig tree by his word? If so, does this at all diminish the solemnity of the warning—appropriate to individuals and nations—against regarding loud profession as a substitute for good deeds?

Read Mark 11:15-19. There are two words for "temple" in the Gospels. One refers to the whole area on which the temple buildings stood—a great rectangle some 600 feet each way, surrounded by colonnades and most of it open to the sky. The other denotes the sanctuary proper—the place where the sacrifices were offered. It is the former that is here called the temple. The traffic

in sheep, oxen, etc., was doubtless carried on in the great open paved Court of the Gentiles, so called because Gentiles were admitted to it, but could not go farther. The Jews coming from a distance had to have some place where they could buy animals for sacrifice and exchange their foreign money for the money in which the temple tax was required to be paid. Jesus' objection to this business was to its being carried on where it prevented many from gaining the benefit of the temple as a place of prayer and worship. Was it for the temple or for people that he was jealous? How does his attitude in this matter compare with his attitude on the Sabbath? Is he in both cases concerned for the welfare of men? In which does he in this case seem to be most interested, that the sacrifices should be offered or that men should have the opportunity to pray? Who were the people whose privilege of prayer he was defending, Jews or Gentiles?

Read Mark 11:20-25. Recall what was said about the story of the fig tree. The lesson of faith which is here associated with it seems to be related to the withering of the fig tree, only in case the fig tree is thought of as a symbol of the Jewish nation, which by the time the Gospel was written seemed to many Christians a great obstacle to the progress of Christianity. The suggestion is that as the fig tree is destroyed for its unfruitfulness, and so taken out of the way, so any obstacle, though it be as a mountain for height, will be removed if we but have faith in God. To this there is added in vss. 24, 25 the lesson of forgiveness, perhaps as a warning against praying for the removal of our enemies in a spirit of vindictiveness. Is the value of this teaching about prayer dependent on its association with the incident of the fig tree? Does it gain added significance from that connection?

Read Mark 11:27-33. Recall the evidence of the Gospels that the scribes and Jewish leaders generally laid great stress on the matter of authority. They were inclined to decide whether to accept a message by considering not the message itself, but some external things that came with it, such, for example, as signs from heaven. On a previous occasion (Mark 8:11, 12) Jesus refused to give such a sign. On this occasion, instead of answering their question about his authority, he asked them a question about John the Baptist. This question silenced them. Did it also in reality answer their question? Did John substantiate his message by signs? See John 10:41. If not, what proved his authority? How does Jesus imply that men are to know what to accept as true and authoritative? See also Mark 7:18 and recall our discussion of it.

Suggestions for further study: 1. If in the view of Jesus the ideas of the Messiah as held by the people of his day were none of them wholly right, and none of them wholly wrong, and if he felt it to be his task and duty to do some things that were expected of the Messiah, and not to do others, what attitude could he consistently take toward these ideas? Could he say at the beginning, "I am the Messiah"? Could he say at the end, "I am not the Messiah"? What course did he pursue? 2. In driving the traders out of the temple did Jesus imply that certain places are intrinsically holy, or that human welfare is sacred? Did he imply that because human welfare is sacred some places ought to be kept sacred to certain uses? Would he approve of using a church to shelter the homeless in time of flood or storm?

31. THREE PARABLES OF WARNING TO THE JEWISH LEADERS.

MATT. 21:28—22:14

At this point in Mark's narrative he inserts only one parable, 2:1-12. Matthew, however, has three, and it seems best to include all of them in our study.

Read Matt. 21:28-32. It is very clear that Jesus by this parable means to contrast the treatment which John and his message had received from the leaders of the Jewish nation with the attitude of those whom they regarded as irreligious. Which of these does he approve? Might he have said the same about their treatment of himself and his message? Which did Jesus regard as most important, assent to the truth of a message or conduct according to it?

Read Matt. 21:33-46. This parable is clearly like the preceding one, a parable of the Jewish nation, but instead of dealing with the conduct of different parties in the nation it epitomizes the history of the nation as a whole. The use of a vineyard as an illustration of the nation is found in the Old Testament, indeed the language of vs. 33 is so largely taken from Isa. 5:1, 2 that a reader familiar with the Old Testament would at once be reminded of that passage. Notice especially the language of verses 41 and 43. Would this suggest that God would go on sending prophets and warnings, or that the nation was now having—or had had—its last opportunity? Verses 43 and 45 are not in Mark's report. What does the addition of them by Matthew show as to how he understood the parable?

Read Matt. 22:1-10. This third parable also clearly deals with the nation. Though employing a different illustration from the preceding one, like it, it emphasized the nation's repeated rejection of opportunity. What does it suggest as the reason for such rejection? Does it as clearly refer to the whole nation as the preceding, or emphasize rather individual responsibility?

Read Matt. 22:11-14. This is a sort of appendix to the main parable but connected with it in the fact that while the main parable points out the danger of rejecting God's invitation and opportunities this intimates that he who accepts them must do so on God's terms and with serious mind. Compare Luke 14:25-35, immediately following 14:15-24, which seems to be a different version of Matt. 22:1-10.

Suggestions for further study: 1. How far was the forecast of the future of the Jewish nation, which is expressed in these parables, actually realized in the subsequent history of the nation? 2. Do the principles here implied respecting God's dealings with Israel apply only to Israel or to nations generally? 3. Is a nation in any sense a moral personality, with a character and history of its own? Are these national sins which will destroy any nation if they are not repented of? Does the punishment for such sins fall on the generation that first commits them, or are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children? 4. Is America now committing any of the sins which the parables charge against Israel?